

THE PRINTER AND THE PREACHER
Fourth of July Sunday –July 3, 2016 –Hebrews 11: 8-12 --Communion
The Church of the Covenant

In Randy Petersen's book, *The Printer and the Preacher*, he notes the "surprising friendship (between Ben Franklin and George Whitefield) that invented America". Ben Franklin was the diplomat, inventor, signer of the Declaration of Independence, political genius, author of "Poor Richard's Almanac". But he was also America's first genuine "media mogul". His Philadelphia newspaper, the Pennsylvania Gazette, was the most read newspaper in America's largest city; his opinion shaped the opinions of the American colonies in advance of the American Revolution of 1776. George Whitefield, less well known today, was the foremost preacher and evangelist of his day. He came out of an Anglican tradition that was to become Methodism. He preached all across the American colonies. He preached revival. He preached having a personal relationship with a personal God. He had been kicked out of preaching in Anglican churches in England, so he came to America where he found the soil fertile, and the fields ripe for harvest, and the landscape of the American colonies ready for revival. George Whitefield preached and the GREAT AWAKENING broke forth. He was the 1700's version of Billy Graham. George Whitefield was a *phenomena* just prior to the American Declaration of Independence. And Ben Franklin was his publicist; Franklin detailed the outbreak of the American Great Awakening in his newspaper. And so began a strange friendship between Franklin and Whitefield, two towering giants of the time in which America was born. As Henry Luce of Time Magazine was the publicist of the young Billy Graham, so Franklin was to Whitefield, what Luce was to Billy Graham. The Printer and the Preacher.

It is a strange friendship because Franklin was not the same sort of Christian as was Whitefield. Whitefield was an on fire evangelical who preached, "Have you received new birth in Jesus?" Franklin was more a secular philosopher and intellect who believed in God. But Petersen's book is also clear that Whitefield's preaching and presentation held an utter fascination for Franklin. Whitefield relished the opportunities to discuss and disagree with his less "Christianized friend". It did not matter that they disagreed about important matters, their friendship was more important to both than their disagreements. Personally, I think this is a most helpful model for us in today's world, as well. We may disagree with one another, but not need to become disagreeable. We can enter into a constructive, ongoing conversation without needing to "convert" someone to our particular viewpoint. But it became clear that Franklin needed Whitefield and Whitefield needed Franklin and so a profound friendship was born.

I cannot emphasize this next point enough. But historians have long recognized that the Great Awakening set up the birth of the Declaration of Independence. The spiritual soil of the nation's heart first had to be cultivated for God for freedom to be born. Jesus had to be born in the heart of early America for freedom to be born on July 4th 1776. Revival preceded the American Revolution. Whitefield's preaching preceded the writing of the Declaration of Independence. A heart turned to Jesus was then a heart open to freedom and a new nation. Faith and Freedom go hand in hand. One cannot exist without the other. To use the analogy of Franklin and Whitefield, they must be friends with one another for they cannot exist alone and apart. They cannot be at odds with one another, secularists battling religion and Christianity criticizing freedom and government. Friendship, not antipathy.

Franklin wrote of Whitefield and revival in his newspaper –"*The alteration in the face of religion here is altogether surprising. Never did the people show so great a willingness to attend sermons...Religion is become the subject of most conversations. No books are in request but those of piety and devotion, and instead of the idle songs and ballads, the people are everywhere entertaining themselves with Psalms,*

hymns and spiritual songs. All which, under God, is owing to the successful labours of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield." (quoted in *The Printer and the Preacher*, Petersen, pp. 222-223) Franklin is detailing the fruit of revival, "the alteration" as he calls it, the changed lives of people, the transformation, their focus and love for the Lord over all else. First the human heart was changed and then the heart of the nation was changed for freedom! John Adams wrote: *"The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; and change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations."* First came the Great Awakening and then flowing from it came freedom, the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. One and inseparable.

I think that what Franklin and Whitefield understood was that America needed Christianity and Christianity needed America. This friendship between these two things, Christianity and America, is the surprising friendship that, in Petersen's phrase, "invented America". It is a good thing to remember on this Fourth of July Sunday.

Our scripture from the New Testament book of Hebrews puts it this way –By faith the early colonists set forth from a spiritually dead Europe. By faith people like the Pilgrims were called forth to go out to a land they were to receive as an inheritance. By faith these early Americans sojourned in the land of promise, living in hardship, facing many dangers, toils and snares along the way. But they were "heirs of the promise", a promise from God, a promise from God placed within every Christian's heart, a promise held within the heart, a promise not just of faith but also of freedom. God made us and created us to have a heart-held desire to be free. And then Hebrews notes: *"(They) looked forward to the city (to the church, and the town, and the community and the nation) whose builder and maker is God."* (Hebrews 11: 10)

On this Fourth of July Sunday, as we approach the sacrament of communion, to receive again the living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ held in these elements, may we ask for a new birth of freedom within our heart, may we ask the Lord to revive our human heart, that it may befriend again America, and enliven its sense of freedom today. America needs God. And Christianity needs America. It is all illustrated by the friendship between a Printer and a Preacher that invented America. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*